

TITLE The Leadership Perceptions of Collegiate Student-Athletes and Their Coaches: A Comparative Analysis

RESEARCHER Michael Brent Kondritz
School of Education and Health Sciences
University of Dayton
Unpublished doctoral dissertation: May 2019

OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship and difference between how NCAA Division I, team sport student-athletes perceive their own leadership behaviors and how their head coaches perceive the same student-athletes' leadership behaviors.

METHODOLOGY

The population consisted of NCAA Division I team sport student-athletes attending either a medium or a large sized, four-year, co-educational private university offering certificates, bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees located in the Midwest (N = 672; of which 436 participated in team sports). The Student version of the Leadership Practices Inventory, along with demographic information, was completed by 121 student-athletes, representing six teams; and the S-LPI (Observer) was completed by their head coaches. There were 40 females and 51 males in the sample, ranging between the ages of 18-24. The largest class were first-year students (46), followed by sophomores (29), juniors (28), and seniors (18). There were nine female team captains and five male team captains.

KEY FINDINGS

There were significant positive correlations between student-athletes and their coaches on the leadership practices of Model, Inspire, and Enable. Paired sample t-tests between student-athletes and their coaches revealed significant differences on all five leadership practices, with coaches perceiving their student-athletes engaging in all of them less often than the students. The eta-squared effect sizes were all large.

The difference between female student-athletes and their head coaches' mean scores was significantly smaller than the difference between male student-athletes and their head coaches' mean scores for Challenge, Enable, and Encourage (all effect sizes small); and no differences found on Model and Inspire. Analyses comparing the difference in scores between female student-athletes and head coaches revealed statistically significant differences in all five practices (with the scores of coaches consistently lower than female student-athletes). Similarly, analyses comparing the difference in scores between male student-athletes and head coaches revealed statistically significant differences in all five practices (with the scores of coaches consistently lower than male student-athletes). ANOVAs revealed significant differences between the leadership practice scores of student-athletes and their respective coaches by year in school.

The author suggested three implications for practitioners (pp. 152-153):

Opportunity to discuss perception gaps. The perception gap between student-athletes and coaches seen in the results of this research provides evidence of an opportunity for discussion regarding leadership to take place between coaches and student-athletes. As coaches are an important part of a student-athletes support network at an institution and since they spend a considerable amount of time with student-athletes, benefits might exist for conversations to take place when instances of perception gaps exist. This could stimulate leadership development in college athletes.

Opportunity to train and develop. Coaches are encouraged to provide and support leadership training and development to their student-athletes. Student-athletes may benefit from leadership training and development as it provides a foundation of skills and behaviors that will assist student-athletes on the court or field and in their communities. Similar to the tactical part of the game, when opportunities are present, practicing leadership skills through coaching, training, and development, might result in improvements that have a positive impact on both individual and team performance.

Competitive advantage. As athletic directors are looking to further advance their athletic departments, supporting the closing of leadership perception differences that might exist between student-athletes and their respective head coaches could provide a competitive advantage to the teams they support. Based on the work of Sala (2003), a leader whose perceptions of self are more in line with others' perceptions is better able to improve performance. Therefore, athletic programs and teams could receive additional benefits by helping student-athletes understand perception differences which might help to maximize their student-athletes' performance as leaders.